



Item Number System

A common question among depository librarians is, "What is the item number system?" In short, the item number system is the mechanism by which depository libraries select which Federal government publications they will receive through the FDLP.

About the item numbers

Item numbers are associated with Superintendent of Documents (SuDocs) classification numbers. An item number may be affiliated with a specific title and its own SuDocs number. Alternatively, an item number may encompass more than one publication title and class number.

For example, an item number may cover a series of a similar nature, e.g., numbered manuals with similar content issued by the same agency. In this instance, the library selecting this type of item number receives all related series. General category classes (e.g., General Publications and Handbooks, Manuals, and Guides) also represent more than one title.

For agencies whose scope and publications are limited, e.g., Fine Arts Commission, Marine Mammal Commission, etc., one item number has been established to cover all publications issued by that agency.

Alternatively, a single publication may be distributed in more than one format and thus have multiple item numbers associated with it; one item number for each format. For example, libraries wanting to select publications from the [Essential Titles for Public use in Tangible Format](#) list will notice that each publication on this list has a different item number for each format in which the publication is disseminated.

The item number assigned to a series generally remains the controlling number for that series regardless of any title change, change in the name of the issuing agency, or transfer of the series or its publishing agency within the Federal Government.

Identifying Item Numbers

A list of each library's item number selections can be found in the [Item Lister](#) and also in the non-GPO resource, [Documents Data Miner 2](#).

Item numbers can be identified in the [List of Classes of U.S. Government Publications Available for Selection by Depository Libraries](#), or as it is more commonly known as, the List of Classes. This publication identifies the title or series (if any), issuing agency and its department, frequency when serial, and format (if known). This list is in Superintendent of Documents Classification order. There is also a list of item numbers and their associated SuDoc class stems in numerical item number order. The List of Classes is published online and distributed to depository libraries twice a year in print. Su Doc GP 3.24:, item number 0556-C.

The additions of new item numbers and the inactivation of old item numbers are announced on shipping lists and in the publication [Administrative Notes Technical Supplement](#) (ANTS). ANTS is available online and is distributed to libraries in their depository boxes. SuDoc GP 3.16/3-3:, item number 0556-C. See the article [Administrative Notes Technical Supplement \(ANTS\)](#) for more information. The ANTS is searchable on-line via the [WEBTech Notes](#) service. The database is currently being used in a MS Excel file, however this is a temporary measure. See the article [WEBTech Notes](#) for more information.



(EL) or Online Only Item Numbers

Item numbers have traditionally been applied to print, microfiche, and tangible electronic media. Item numbers have been the basis of most distribution and bibliographic control processes. Based on requests from the depository community, item numbers and SuDoc classification numbers were applied to online only information products, even though online only publications are not physically distributed to the libraries like their tangible counterparts. This enabled depository personnel and users to relate online products to the tangible products in their depository collections.

Depository libraries often wonder why they should select exclusively (EL), or online only, item numbers. With multiple format item numbers it makes sense to select the item number when a tangible publication may be distributed in addition to any electronic publication that may be available. But what is the need to include exclusive (EL) item numbers in the library's item selection profile when nothing is being distributed physically? Why bother to select them when libraries can add the bibliographic records to their catalogs and/or the resources themselves to their Web pages without selecting the (EL) item numbers?

There are several reasons exclusively (EL) item number selection may be beneficial including:

- * Occasionally GPO adds new item numbers representing new publications to depository library profiles based on the libraries' current item selection profiles. The assumption is that libraries will want publications similar to those they already select. By doing this, libraries do not have to wait until the next item selection update cycle to add the new item number to their selection profile. If the newly created item number is for a tangible publication, libraries will receive the publication at its inception. Libraries that do not want the new publications may drop them at any time.
- * Libraries subscribing to cataloging records from third party vendors may find the addition of (EL) item numbers to the library's item selection profile can ease the process of setting up and tailoring the vendor's bibliographic record load.
- * The Locate in Library feature found in the Catalog of U.S. Government Publications (CGP) is based off of an individual library's item selection profile. Online information seekers looking at a CGP record may use the Locate in Library feature to identify a library that has staff knowledgeable of an online resource based on their selection of it. By using this feature they may also identify a library's collection strengths.
- * Users of the CGP will also be able to locate libraries that provide access to free, but passworded databases, which require on-site library usage, e.g., STAT-USA.
- * Various databases and applications have been developed in the FDLP community to monitor who selects what, what subject areas are represented in the region, and so on. GPO has created the [Union List of Item Selections](#) to facilitate these applications, while non-GPO tools like [Documents Data Miner 2](#) (DDM2) also provide similar information. Consistent data about item selections will produce better results when examining what subject expertise is available in regions as well as what types of information resources libraries include in their collection management policy.
- * Libraries may use their item selection profile to aid in the identification of new online publications and their associated catalog records through [New Electronic Titles](#). Additionally, a future GPO plan is have the capability to "push" catalog records to depository libraries, and this process may be driven by a library's item selection profile.
- * Some publications currently designated as an (EL) publication may revert to a tangible publication designation at the request of the issuing agency. In other cases, if the agency discontinues posting the complete publication online, GPO will issue the publication in a tangible format. When this happens, libraries that select the (EL) item number would receive the tangible version without missing any issues. Libraries will



receive the new format only if they select the item number for the online publication.

Implications for Collection Development

The true measure of a library's collection development success is not a comparison of your institution's item selections to the item selection rates of a similar size and type of library. Instead, a robust collection that meets the Federal government information needs of its community is a successful library. Depository libraries should manage their item selection profiles in ways that best meet the information needs of their users.

Any collection development policy should reflect decisions made regarding the selection and access points of U.S. Government publications. Libraries that choose not to select item numbers for various publications (e.g., to become a more electronic depository and reduce the amount of tangible resources being received) should revise their collection development policy to reflect this decision.

As a reminder, selective libraries may only choose one tangible format in addition to providing access to any online only version. Regional libraries may select any formats available, providing that one tangible format is selected.

Maintaining a History of Your Item Selection Profile

Libraries should retain historical files of their item selection profile as they may contain information about when an item was selected, dropped, or discontinued; or when the associated publications were superseded, changed format, given a new SuDocs class number, or sent to a selective housing site, etc. This information may come in useful for retrospective cataloging projects as well as disposal projects.

Note that item cards were once issued to identify library selections. These cards should be retained for planned and unplanned future needs. If item cards are no longer maintained by the library, other means of establishing the item selection history must be in place, e.g., archiving copies of the [Item Lister](#) records, maintaining a local database, customizing electronic files from data downloaded from the Federal Bulletin Board, FDLP Desktop, etc. See the article [Item Lister](#) for more information. For more information about the process of the item selection update cycle, see the [Amendment of Item Selections](#) article.